



Forest Heights Police Department Policy and Procedures Manual

Subject:	Press and News Releases			
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A. Purpose

To establish a uniform procedure for the Forest Heights Police Department (FHPD) for the release of timely information in an accurate format to the news media.

B. Policy

1. It is the policy of the FHPD to provide accurate and timely information in a written format to the news media and to establish an atmosphere of trust, cooperation, openness and mutual respect between the FHPD and members of the media.
2. Related to non-police matters, the Town of Forest Heights Public Information Officer (PIO) will be the Mayor or the Mayor's designee, who will be responsible for coordinating the release of all public information. The FHPD Chief will assist other FHPD personnel in handling any problems that may be encountered with the media.
3. The Chief will handle arrangements and requests for interviews between the media and members of the FHPD.
4. For general police matters the Chief or his designee will be responsible for the release of information. The Mayor or designee will be advised of any media requests for information by media sources prior to granting such requests.
5. For serious, note worthy, or controversial matters the Chief will ensure coordination with the Mayor's office prior to any information being released.
6. In addition to preparing releases on crimes and criminal activities, when applicable, the FHPD will prepare releases on the following:
 - a. Crime prevention activities;
 - b. Youth/police activities;
 - c. Spot announcements;
 - d. Information brochures; and
 - e. Public service activities.

C. Preparation of a News Release

1. The news release will be on official Department letterhead provided for that purpose. .
2. The release shall be typed, double-spaced, and on one side of the sheet.
3. If longer than one page, the word "MORE" shall be centered on the bottom of the page.
4. Each page will end with a complete sentence and paragraph.
5. It shall be well constructed and furnish all facts consistent with this policy. It will provide the date issued, case number, and name of the Chief for future reference.
6. Duplicate copies of prepared media releases will be furnished to authorized reporters upon request.
7. Duplicate copies of the releases and clippings of all articles will be maintained in a file established for that purpose.
8. Copies of reports, records or official departmental documents shall not be given to the news media without specific authorization of the FHPD Chief.

D. Points to Consider When Preparing a News Release

The following circumstances must be considered when preparing a release:

1. The necessity to prevent interference with or the hampering of a police investigation.
2. The necessity to preserve evidence.
3. The necessity to protect the safety of victims of the crime.
4. The necessity to protect the identity of informants.
5. The necessity to successfully apprehend the perpetrators of the crime.
6. The necessity to protect the constitutional rights of persons accused of a crime.
7. The necessity to avoid prejudicial pre-trial publicity.

E. Information Not To Be Provided

Press releases will not list the names of individuals, or the accompanying details in the following cases:

1. The name of juveniles under 18 years of age (unless the juvenile has been waived from juvenile to adult court).
2. Any neglected child.
3. Victims of a sex crime.
4. Persons taken into custody, because of mental illness.
5. In the case of death, the Identity of victims will not be revealed to the news media until the next of kin are notified.
6. Prior record of accused.
7. Character or reputation of accused.
8. The existence or contents of any confession, admission, or statement made by the accused, or any examination or test.
9. The identity, testimony, or credibility of any prospective witness.
10. Any opinion as to the guilt or innocence of the accused or to the possibility that a plea of guilty may be made.
11. Any opinion as to the merits of the case or the evidence in the case.

F. Information To Be Provided in the News Release

The following information may be released to the media.

1. The name, age, residence, occupation and family status of the accused.
2. Information necessary to aid in the apprehension of the accused.
3. Facts and circumstances of the arrest, including the time and place of arrest, and information regarding the pursuit that took place, resistance made and any weapon(s) used.
4. Description of the offense charged.

G. News Media at a Crime Scene

As previously stated, the policy of the FHPD will be to cooperate with the news media and to facilitate their ability to gather news items at a crime scene, however, certain things will not be allowed which are:

1. News media representative will not be allowed into the crime scene where evidence is secured until the police have collected all the items of evidence and completed their work.
2. The news media will not interview any person in custody unless the accused requests or consents in writing to such an interview after being adequately informed of his/her right to consult with an attorney and of his/her right to refuse to grant such an interview.

Chapter 8 Section 2

3. The police may not deliberately pose any person in custody for photographing or televising by representatives of the news media. This is not meant to prohibit the random photographs of a suspect by the media.

H. News Releases by Other Agencies

1. This FHPD has an agreement for certain releases to be handled by the Prince George's County Police Department.
2. Releases that fall within this category will be forwarded to the Public Information Officer for the County Police Department for proper dissemination.
3. Releases that are fire related will be handled by the Prince George's County Fire Department.
4. Officers at the scene of a crime should refer the news media to the FHPD Chief or designee for the details of the incident.
5. If neither is available the officer may release the minimum information as outlined in this Section of the FHPD manual.
6. The FHPD Chief or designee will give an in depth release at a later time.